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Four Quarters




VOL. 32
NO. 4
SUMMER 1983
TWO DOLLARS





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Four Quarters

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Racing

GLORIA RUTH

1.

Inside a Bell helmet, breath shakes
Mid-Ohio 1976—
first time around,
speed forces time
like pulling on the hands of a clock.
Long straight so hypnotic,
I miss the turn, hit sand,
watch course workers scatter like roaches in the light.

That same corner, three weeks before,
Abe Smith's Pacer flipped end for end.
He hung by his belts upside down,
until they cut him out.

2.

Indianapolis Raceway Park, 1979—
Turn three, a hard right-hander,
I let the car drift to the edge.
Rear view,
a Spitfire passes on my left,
scrapes paint as he goes,
runs out of road, hits the grass
and spins into my door.

I watch that door
fold around my knee like tin foil,
as I drive away.
In the mirror,
Spitfire hits the wall behind me.

In the next turn,
I hold the door shut with my left hand,
steer with my right,
and think about Phil Shade
who bled to death in his garage.
Jack-stands collapsed with no one to notice.
Death should make more noise.

Coca-Cola & Gasoline

WILLIAM K. BOTTORFF

KENNY HELD the shiny new steel oil can upside down with its skinny snout spurting pretend oil as he made his thumbs press and release the can's flat bottom which breathed poo-pop poo-pop because he was playing mechanic and he even had on the flimsy cloth cap that Hank gave him that unfolded from flat to round to sort of like a bell-boy's hat to cover a man's hair from grease, but which pretty near covered Kenny's whole head and kept slipping over his eyes so he had to keep pushing it back and almost dropped the oil can, which he put down so as not to catch it for denting it new and took off the cap.

"How come these caps 'v got printing on em, Daddy?"

He read, as he always read everything, on the oil can *HANK* scratched neatly on with a big nail and, yellow on black, "The PEOPLES Store 119 S. Washington St. Tiffin, Ohio Clothing On Easy Credit 6 7/8," from the cap out loud.

"'S Tiffin a town, Daddy?"

"Yep, not far. Hardwares and shops and stores give mechanics hats ta advertise stuff. They wear out real fast. Gimme the can son. I wanta fill it."

"Okeedokee."

Kenny watched Hank untwist the brass fitting at the base of the spout and set the bowl down on the sawhorse a little tippy, then unscrew the lid of a large bottle of oil that showed glimmering red-brown-green-yellow through the glass under the bright sun in the driveway, and at a nod from Hank Kenny held the bowl steady and Hank poured in just enough oil without spilling, glup-a glup-a, then twisted and straightened the bottle with not a drip and put back on its lid, then the spout of the can, taking it then from Kenny to tighten it sure.

"See how?"

"Yep."

"Here, son. Take this in the grage 'n put it on the left shelf. Then come get these tools."

Kenny put a finger in the bottle's neck loop and squeezed then tilted it, and put his other hand underneath and lifted it and hugged

it into the garage dark and warm with the scents of old timbers and gasoline, and looked out for spiders as he put the bottle on the shelf he could barely reach, then dust-clapped his hands across each other like he knew he should after doing some work, then skipped out to the tools by the sawhorse where because they were through working on the car Hank oiled the clattery old iron lawn mower Kenny could not even reach the handle of yet, but he could not push it anyway because it was so heavy, and picked up the tools.

"Put em in the open drawer of the big tool box, you'll see where they go, then shut that drawer."

"Okeedokee."

"MODEL-A FORD" said one tool, an expander or something, and there was a sparkplug wrench and a couple other metal things Kenny watched Hank use but did not know the names of and a gap gauge and a funny wire brush, and he fit them all into their places in the big drawer on his bare knees on the gravel floor of the garage, then pushed in the drawer which he could just do, it was so heavy, then stood up and brushed his knees and his hands and wished he could have tightened the plugs in, but Hank said it took a lot of muscle.

"We'll go in two shakes of a lamb's tail, Kenny. Jis wait'll I clean up 'n we'll take our spin."

"Swell."

Hank went through the screen door that's spring always banged it, and Kenny could see him through the kitchen window of the neat little one-story house and hear the water run and see him dry off and Molly grab the towel and shake her finger at him for using the dish cloth for hands, then Hank gave her a peck and put on his shirt and said "We'll ketch a bite ta eat uptown 'n git gas bfore I drop Kenny at the show. O. K.?" and heard Molly say "Yep. I'll take my bath 'n, well, I'll look for you back in a hour or so," and Hank came out and down the three wooden steps and headed for the Model A and said "Les go."

"Oh boy!"

And Molly yelled out the door, "Hank. Now don't go by the roadhouse. No sense takin him to see those, well, they'll be busy on Saturday afternoon."

"Don't worry, babe. We'll eat at the diner over on Broadway. 'S cheap n good. Jis a snack. The roadhouse girls cn do thout these two men today."

Hank laughed and Molly stuck out her tongue after him and grinned and did shame-on-you with her two pointer fingers at him, and Kenny hopped and heisted and got his legs over the running board and his bottom onto the car seat and nerr-nerred and pretended to drive, while Hank backed her out into Williams Street and shifted and went on uptown and through town and chugged to a stop and

turned her off and put on the hand brake in front of the diner, and Kenny read "KORNER KITCHEN • EATS • BEER • PIE" across the big window with "NRA Member U.S. We Do Our Part" on the door as they went in, and Hank plopped down on a stool and Kenny boosted himself up onto one cool on his legs and so was the counter on his elbows and heard and smelled the hamburg fat frying and felt the heat from the grille and saw and smelled ketchup and mustard and onions and a dozen other scents and drooled.

"We reserve the right to refuse service to anyone," Hank read aloud. "Hiya, May. Ya gonna serve us guys?"

"Shoot, we serve everybody'n's brother in here, Hank. You know that," May said and took her pencil from behind her ear with "What'll you boys have—that's legal?"

Jis a snack, but sumpn'll stick to our ribs. First off a beer'd hit the nail on the head."

"Comin up, one Buckeye. Milk fill the bill fer you, Kenny?"

"Sure, Miss White. Choclote."

May dealt two cork coasters to them and winked at Hank because they were for beer, and Kenny started to read his to himself while Hank told May two hamburgs with everything, and Kenny butter-fingered his milk glass but only dropped it an inch and did not spill, and read in his head his coaster *BUCKEYE BEER IT'S KRAEUSEN-BREWED AS OF OLD The Buckeye Brewing Co. Toledo, Ohio, and from the back, Buckeye Beer Is Better Because Buckeye Insists Upon The Finest Rice, Malt And Hops Found On Earth You Are Therefore Offered The Same Old Fashioned Beer That You Enjoyed Before Prohibition—Beer Brewed The Same As In Germany To-Day—And Always It's Kraeusened Picks You Up*, then their hamburgs arrived on thick hefty white china plates with dark green trim lines and little tiny bowls on the side with extra relish in case, because May knew they sometimes wanted them that way, and Kenny held his hamburger in both hands and closed his eyes on the meat and paper-thin onion slices hanging over the bun and bit, tasted, and never stopped, it was so delicious, until he was half through.

"Whoa son, slow down. Ya'll git sick agin."

"My eye, Daddy, not on hamburgs."

"O. K."

"How's the beer, Hank?"

"You know Buckeye, May. Not worth a cent but it's a pick-me-up."

"Cold enough, I mean."

"About right. Gimme a light fer a coffin nail will ya? And another beer."

Kenny wrinkled up his nose as Hank lit up, though the first puff always smelled fine, then watched Hank drink from the tall brown

bottle of Buckeye and saw it and them in the mirror behind the counter, and the shiny steel grille and hood and the malt maker and the big glass-doored ice box and piles of loaves of bread and stacks of plates and of orange and white and red cereal boxes, and the cook who was a dirty skinny little man with brown teeth and May in their aprons who had huge breasts and bleached hair and lots of perfume and makeup, a little hefty but still young and a looker like Hank said once, and finished his milk and smacked and wiped his lips and fingers with the paper napkin.

Where's yer head cook n bottle washer, Hank?"

"Home. Alive 'n kickin— 'n waitin'."

"That's the ticket. Too bad ya got all that under yer belt though 'f she's waitin. 'N how bout Kenny?"

"Goin ta the show, right, son? 'N I'll be ready after a bath 'n a shave.

"Geez, I wish I was off's afternoon, ya big lug."

"May yer a card, honest. 'Member the song? 'My sweet tooth says I wanta, but my wisdom tooth says no.' "

"Anybody else 'n I'd say yer not all there. But you 'n Moll 'r real doves."

"Thanks May. Yer a great gal yerself. Well, 's take the air, Kenny. Gotta hit the fillin' station May. Playin tonight out at the roadhouse and 'bout outta gas."

"Hey Hank, there's yer skimmer ya left in here last week."

"Damned if I didn't. Got ta yappin 'n fergot. Thanks, May. Might wanta pass the hat."

"Sure. See ya."

"See ya."

"Bye, Kenny."

"Bye, Miss White."

Hank cocked his wide-brimmed hat on and they barged out, and Hank had his hands in his pockets then he said, "It don't rain but it pours," and Kenny asked, "Huh?" and got a "Never mind" as they climbed back into the A and headed for the Hi-Speed Station on Conant, while Hank mumbled, "Every Sheba Wants A Sheik Strong Of Muscle Smooth Of Cheek," and Kenny yelled "Burma Shave!"

I GOTTA PISS SO BAD my back teeth 'r floatin" was how Hank greeted Carney at the filling station while Kenny sat on two tires because he knew Hank would gas a while not just get gas, and Carney patted him on the head and slipped him an empty tobacco can and Kenny out loud while Hank reached up over the hood and took off the cap and cranked the big tall pump that made the gas sort of red gurgle in the glass top and put the hose in, "Lord Kenyon Blend Super-Mild Tobacco A Formula Of The Finest Imported And Domes-

tic Tobaccos Blended By An Expert To Give A Mild, Mellow, Fragrant Pipe Tobacco, Without Tongue Bite." Hank and Carney laughed after saying something about tongue biting. "Truly A Tobacco Deserving Of The Lords Of England Concessioned By LORD KENYON TOBACCO CO., LTD. 207-209 St. Clair Toledo, Ohio. Factory No. 6 10th District Of Ohio. Notice: The Manufacturers Of This Tobacco Have Complied With All The Requirements Of Law: Every Person Is Cautioned, Under The Penalties Of Law, Not To Use This Package For Tobacco Again," and the two men laughed again after saying something about used cans, as they stood under the overhang above the pumps between two stanchions beneath big letters on the front, HI-SPEED GAS STATION and on the sides HI-SPEED GASOLINE.

There was a little office with windows like a house's and a desk and rubber and grease smells, and in back the rest rooms that said GENTLEMEN and LADIES Get Key and an air pump Kenny knew because he explored everything once, and he saw Carney put down the big water can full and light his pipe once Hank had stopped pumping and stood with the cap in his hand.

"Been at the Buckeye again huh?"

"Yep, gotta go out back."

"Better not, 'less you want some stuff."

"Yer kiddin'."

"Nope. Gal's workin' her way through. Honest. Got off the Trailways 'n came here 'n set up in the Men's. Had two, three guys two-block 'er already."

"Damn. Jis like that?"

"She asked 'n I let er. Got it free first. Two bucks."

"The hell. After this gas I'm dead broke. But hell, I don't step out anaway. You know that."

"O. K. But you cn have the gas on credit 'f ya wanta."

"Mighty white a ya, Carney. But Moll's waitin now. 'Sides, this'll cut into the Roadhouse business 'n Calvin'll be mad 'f he finds out, 'n me sort of a partner."

"Ya mean he's all set up 'n open fer business already?"

"You bet. Got three, one on the way. Five dollars fer real fine stuff. All meat 'n no patatas."

"Well Hank, she won't hurt. She's a scag anaway, and she's leavin on this afternoon's bus anyhow. O.K.?"

O heck yeh. Never mind. Hope ta tell ya a scag won't bother our gals' style."

"Hope to hell not."

A door slammed and a man walked by them from out back buttoning his fly and smelling of whiskey. Kenny wrinkled up his nose and stretched his legs, and the man sneezed, and Carney and

Hank laughed loud and long and said they "Didn't know you could be allergic to it" as the man staggered away, and Hank said "He's a pistol" and Carney said "He sure makes a damn racket with that sneezin'," and "Say Kenny, ya ragamuffin, how ya doin'?"

"Perty good, Mr. Gray."

"How old 'r ya now, Ken?"

"Seven 'n a half."

"Spittin image a yer ol' man."

"Well, least he doesn't look like the milkman."

Both men laughed again and Hank finally put the cap back on and said it was a little hard to get a purchase on it, then said to Kenny, "Got room fer a Coke, Ken?" and "Got a Buckeye left in that cooler, Carney?"

"Heck yeh, Daddy."

"You bet, Hank. Help yerself. 'S on me."

"Open em up will ya, Kenny?"

"Yep."

And Kenny read out loud the sign above the big cooler, "We Don't Know Where Ma Is But We Have Pop On Ice" and the men laughed, and Kenny reached up and with all his might opened the long lid and hinged it back against the sign, then stood on a root beer crate and bent over and plunged his hand into the icy water and pulled out a Coke then pulled a Buckeye out with his other hand, and climbed down and sat the dripping bottles down on the crate and closed the lid, then fss-popped off the caps in the opener on the cooler and heard them clack into the catcher, then handed Hank his beer and stood holding his little green bottle in both hands while the three of them watched a Ford V-8 coupe painted black and white pull up to the other pump and honk twice.

"Fill 'er up, Carney" said a fat man with a badge on his cap leaning out the window, and "Ya gotta quit keepin' beer in that cooler 'cause ya got no license."

"Sure, Milt. It's about gone."

"Good nuf."

"How's she runnin, Milt?"

"Real good, Hank. Lotta zip in that niney horses."

"I bet."

Kenny heard the gasoline run into the tank and sipped his Coke, then he felt the scent of the gasoline filling his nose almost with a pressure and his eyes, which he closed, and then his whole throat, and he took three long swigs of Coke and felt the fizz and tasted the wonderful sweetness and deep flavor, and felt happy blending the scents and tastes clean through him, with the warm sun on his face and the hamburger and everything inside him and the thought of seeing the movie and maybe meeting Betty Penistone there, and his strong Dad there by him and his beautiful Mom at home waiting, and the delicate subtle fine blend to taste and smell of gasoline and Coke.

"Whatcha grinnin' at, Kenny?"

"Oh. Nothin, Mr. Kelsey. Jis feel good."

"That's a good boy."

A man rounded the corner of the station and Kenny saw Hank give him the high sign so he ducked back and the policeman paid and drove off with "See you birds. Keep yer noses clean," and Kenny smelled the exhaust and heard the men laugh a little laugh, and then the red-faced man cleared the corner and hurried across the street, and Hank and Carney were red too and laughed hard.

"Jesus. Jesus damn. I gotta git that dame outta there. Hell it's jail 'f I don't.

"Yep ya better. Hell. Never mind. Looka there."

They turned and a thin round-shouldered young woman went across the street toward the bus station restaurant, with a little card-board suitcase and a wrinkled old blue coat and twisted hose and hair half tangled, walking slow and tired.

"Jesus what a life."

"Yeh Hank. It's hard times by Gawd. Aw hell. After I close up I'm goin ta paint the town red. Probly see ya out ta the roadhouse tonight."

"Hope so Carney. Least that damn Kelsey can't come out there, outta town."

"Yeh. Don't like ta poor-mouth a guy, but he's a real prick 'f there ever was one."

The men laughed hard again and Kenny wondered and still held his warming Coke, but Hank had put his empty down and gone to the Gents' and then into the station and come back with a roadmap.

"Christ yes. He's worse n' that damn dumb mayor we got, that dumb Carter Feinman."

"Ya mean Farter Keinman?"

They laughed again long and loud, and said something about "He ain't quite white" and Hank unfolded the map and sort of stretched it over his knee, his foot on the A's shiny back bumper, and Kenny rubber-necked to read it.

"Goin out 'th May?"

"Nope. Nosiree. She give me the gate hinges 'n all."

"Geez. Sorry ta hear that."

"I ain't kickin. Any day I almost git in a jam but don't 's O. K. I'm gonna eat me some mountain oysters er somepthin and take on one a yer gals. 'N git a snootful."

"Good thinkin."

"Takin a trip?"

"Might. See f the A can make it ta Inaplis. The old T'd a never got there."

"Hell, yer the best mechanic around. You could a made it. Sister lives there don't she?"

"Yep. Had ta move up. Hardly afford it though. Kenny, kin ya

find the miles?"

Kenny read *Transcontinental Mileage Chart, Toledo, Ohio* on the side, the across *Indianapolis, Ind.* on top, and said "217," and Hank turned the whole map over and told Kenny to find the route, and Kenny peered and peered and finally said, "It only shows ta Fort Wayne, and it's 24 in one a those little shields."

"That's U. S., a real good highway. Then we swing down ta Muncie 'n on over. Well, cmon, Kenny. You wanta make that show, the matinee."

"Yer havin' yer own matinee huh, Hank?"

The men laughed again, and Hank said he forgot, and told Kenny to get the can out of the back seat, and he did and unscrewed the big top off the domed gallon gas can, let it hang by its chain and sat it down, and Carney put the pump nozzle into the hole and made some motions that made the men laugh, and once again Kenny smelled the gasoline and picked up his Coke again and finished it warm but still good, then put the lid back on and lifted the solid heavy can by its wire handle with both hands, careful not to spill any out of its little curved spout that Hank shoved a wood shaving in anyhow and said "Got ta clean up the mower and some tools n stuff," and paid Carney another 18¢ as they hopped in.

"Shake it easy, Hank."

"Yeh, Carney. Keep yer pecker up. Be sure ta come on out tonight. Music 'n eats 'n gals."

"Sure nuf."

"And no more pumpin Ethyl out back—jis up here."

And they sped off with Kenny reading from a sign *You Test A Springboard Before Diving . . . See The Karat Mark On Gold Before Buying . . . And When You Stop To Get Gasoline, The Ethyl Emblem Tells You Which Pump Contains The Best.*

IN FRONT OF THE UNION MOVIE HOUSE Hank said to Kenny, " 'Ts a double feature isn't it?"

"Yep, a serial too 'n stuff."

"Well have fun 'n see em all."

"O. K. Specially 'f I have a pal ta sit with."

"You know that kid don't ya?"

"Yeh. That's Wilmer. But he's a bully 'n I won't sit 'th him. There's Betty. She'll sit 'th me I know."

"O. K. Then you cn walk home 'th her too 'n on home. O. K.?"

"Okeedokee, Daddy."

"Here. Here's yer dime. 'N here. Here's 15¢ fer popcorn 'r somepthin."

"Oh boy. Thanks."

Then Hank sped off again and Kenny skipped up to Betty who had seen him and was grinning like he was grinning, and they reached

up and paid their dimes and took their tickets and walked past the signs for Dick Tracy and Hopalong Cassidy and other stars, they did not care who so they did not read the words, and handed the big boy in the baggy uniform their tickets, and Kenny took the stubs after the big boy tore them in two and wondered as he always did why they did that because he never knew what to do with them.

And in the darkness that already smelled like two hundred kids they found seats together in the middle, because girls did not try for the front row like boys sometimes even fighting for it, and Kenny stumbled past the dim aisle light and a kid's foot because he was looking at Betty Penistone and telling her he would get them some stuff later when the newsreel was on, and they sank down and watched Mickey and Minnie do funny things.

Then during the feature Kenny found himself holding Betty Penistone's hand and blushing red hot in the dark and sighing and wondering and almost wanting to cry.

And then after the first feature Betty Penistone said she was not allowed to sit through both, just one, but why not go home now and they would still have time to play Monopoly and have Ovaltine, and Kenny said "Swello," and that—remember?—her set was still over to his house, but that was O. K. and they could play there anyhow, and he bet his Ma would get them some cookies too, and he knew his Ma and Dad would be home.

So Kenny and Betty headed on home holding hands, behind the Hi-Speed Station when Kenny smelled far-away gasoline and could just read GENTLEMEN and LADIES Get Key, then through the wide shady streets, smiling and sometimes skipping, and Kenny sang "When you come to the end of a lollipop" and Betty sang "When you come to the end of a perfect day." They played Step On A Crack and did not try to hurry their walk but rather made the most of it.

Finally they reached 403 Williams and went up the front walk and the steps and through the screen door without banging it and Kenny went right for the set under the davenport and took it out and opened the board onto the carpet and chose his race car and Betty took her thimble and they counted out the money.

"Isn't Mnopoly the swellest new game ever?"

"Yep. 'Less ya roll triple doubles."

From the front bedroom they heard Hank not very loud yell "Keep it down Kenny, play quiet will ya" and the springs squeak.

Kenny and Betty giggled and blushed and made pretend keys lock their lips and played silently on until he blurted out "PAY SCHOOL TAX OF \$150."

From Hank came muffled with a little giggle from Molly, though Kenny scarcely registered it by now, "Why the hell aren't the schools open on Saturday?"

The game progressed with the rattle of the dice and the counting

of the moves and the occasional giggles and the springs' squeaks and a final "Advance to Go" and "Go to Jail" and Betty's "Oh boy" and Kenny's "Oh darn" and Molly and Hank's "Oh-Oh" and the silence in the little house until feet touched the floor in the bedroom.

Molly emerged into the hall carrying the pink bag and hose she sometimes gave enemas to Kenny with in her kimono that Kenny loved the bright greens and reds and yellows of and disappeared behind the bathroom door. Hank wandered out rumple-haired in work pants and undershirt and slippers with a cigarette slanting across his lips.

"You kids sure got out early."

"Betty wasn't 'lowed ta see em both, Daddy, 'cause her Ma thinks it hurts er eyes. 'N we thought we cd play Mnoply'n maybe have cookies."

"Listen, go play out back a while. Yer Ma 'n I gotta git ta the store 'fore five er it'll be closed 'n we won't git any food til Mondy, 'n then we gotta git ready ta go ta the roadhouse tanight right after supper. You gotta go along, Kenny. We'll take Betty home on the way ta the store."

"Oh geez, O. K."

"Sure, Mr. Swan."

Hank turned on the radio and while it warmed up Kenny and Betty carefully set the set by the wall between the davenport and the Philco and then they skipped down the hall and through the kitchen where Kenny grabbed four chocolate chips and banged out into the back yard munching. "Music, Maestro, Please!" came from way indoors and Molly softly sang "Music mousetrap cheese" at the bathroom window and the faint scent of vinegar reached them. A dog barked at them from the back neighbor's but soon gave it up. Kenny hopped on the sawhorse and pumped up and down and said how Hopalong Cassidy was his favorite and Betty sat on it sideways and spurred him on.

"Cmon. I'll show ya somepthin neat."

He led her by the hand into the gloom of the garage and picked up the shiny new steel oil can and held it between them and squeezed it poh-pup poh-pup and it shot oil almost on Betty's front. He dropped the can onto the gravel floor.

"Oh geez. Geez, Betty, oh gosh I'm sorry. I fergot it was full."

"S O. K., Kenny. Didn't hit me 'r anythin. I'm O. K."

Kenny picked up the can he saw he had scratched and made a little dent in and put it back on the work bench.

"O.K. is right. Gee, yer jist swell, Betty."

"Yer nice too, Kenny. Honest."

"Are you sorta my girl?"

"'F you want me ta be."

"You bet."

"O. K. then."

They did nothing more than look at each other an instant and then they went over and climbed into the Model A's back seat and held hands and grinned and Betty sang "When you come to the end of a lollipop" until Kenny's folks hopped in too and off they sped toward Betty's.

Crying in Anger

KATE JENNINGS

Sleepless nights, and finally I think
I've finally had it: the hours from

two to four squandered writing biting
letters to you in my head, wondering

when and if I'll ever outgrow the wish
to love you or not to need you. Rage,

guilt, pain, the rainbow of spite that
flows through me at your needling words:

but how foolish of me! You were only
teasing, and you have a right to your

little jokes; fair's fair. There you
sit, humming to yourself, eager to hear

bad reports about me, nodding, not at
all surprised. The unacknowledged news

I've stopped sending's small loss to
you. You laugh gently: so serious!

Can't I take a joke? And if I say I'm
hurt, if I complain, you start as though

astonished and cry, "Why, I didn't mean
a thing by that!" You never do. Maternal

as always, and of course I know you care.

In Quest of Destinations

LOUIS DANIEL BRODSKY

Without sight behind me, I assume
That the concrete rushing up under my hood
Is consumed by my momentum, or wound tightly
On a reel whose diameter never fluctuates.

Possibly, my vehicle is absolutely static
On a two-lane conveyor belt
Moving ahead on a well-greased spindle,
Returning unseen below me to its beginning.

Occasionally strange shapes overtake me
Out of the blind periphery of my left eye,
Rush by as if on a private strip,
Then disappear over the horizon:

I search continuously to catch a glimpse of them
Twisting through tenuous bends,
Only the passing phantoms leave my vision
Without a forwarding address: I'm left

To guess at the highway's mindless intentions,
And let intuition track their invisible passage.
As I'm carried along in my silent capsule
An unsettling image of painted plains Indians

Chasing buffalo toward an inevitable cliff
Invades my quietude, and I begin to suspicion
That everyone before me may have plunged
To the rocky abyss of the skyline ahead

Where fate might be waiting for me.
I lean sharply to my right, and the car
Slides from its forward motion onto the edge
And dies. With my ear to the raised window,

I listen in fear, straining to hear sounds
Resembling war cries, hoof beats,
Bird points pelting my trunk lid,
Weird noises that might alert me

To a stampede catching my stalled existence:
I wait as hours become empty decades

Before finally venturing back on the conveyor,
Satisfied that I've just been imagining vagaries.

Yet, as I proceed, the concrete changes colors;
Pinks fuse with clotted crimson hues.
I cringe, uncertain of what next to expect:
Dusk, death, or perpetuation of the quest.

Bottoms

KAY DEETER

Well-bred buns,
benign in leotard tights,
stir, stir.

Slowly fold your front-stage
dough and pump
the rumpage.

Be noble globs
of brain-behinds
in front of social eyes.

Think of stretch
and sway like spiders
in a tradewind.

Figure on a
first-row patron
paying for anything

but the ends
which switch in
sensuous hips just

inches off the waistland.
Then fully face
the grump and
raise rebuttals.

Grayson's Dreams

JOHN M. McNAMARA

A LONG THE LENGTH of the tree-lined street, the tiny front lawns trimmed at the sidewalks, the grass as green as still swamp water, the women stood at their doorways, some in housecoats, others in skirts and blouses or baggy slacks, shaking their heads, indicating that the man had not hidden in their homes. Staring from woman to woman, Grayson sensed his hope sinking and his anger swelling; he turned, his fists clenched so tightly his knuckles whitened, and faced his own house, with the corner porch screened against the summer insects, the wood trim around the windows flaking white paint chips to the driveway, the brick walls rough and fading from the red hue of years before to a dull brown. He advanced up the steps, across the porch and vestibule to the living room, across the carpet and around the settee to the stairs, bounding two steps at a stride, pausing at the landing to listen, and hearing no sound whatsoever, walking deliberately down the corridor to the bedroom where his wife lay sleeping. Grayson chose not to wake her. He pivoted from the room and retraced his steps down the corridor to the bathroom, where a chill beckoned to him from the shower stall. His steps across the narrow room seemed sluggish as he grasped the shower curtain and yanked it back; the man leaped from his crouch, his arms flailing at Grayson, the curtain tangled between the two men. The rod tore from its moorings. They wrestled, the curtain wrapping itself around them both like a blanket. Every rapist deserves to die, Grayson told himself, driving towards the man's eyes with the fingers of one hand, the other tightening around his throat. Grayson hunched his back as the man railed desperate blows on his back and shoulders.

Another dream, a bout of sweating anger, waking with the bedsheet knotted between his legs, and his wife, Kate, shying to the far side of the bed, avoiding the arms flung at his imaginary foe.

Awareness oozed over Grayson's consciousness as he ceased his struggling, bent his legs and pulled them to his chest, circling them with his arms; he tilted forward and rested his forehead, slick and greasy, on his knees. Breathing deeply he turned his head toward Kate. An expression of weary understanding was visible in her eyes, and Grayson wondered at the depth of her patience. For the past week the same or similar dreams—of rapists and revenge—had plagued his

nights until the prospect of sleep conveyed a fear, not of the dream itself, but of its inconclusiveness, of the frustration of premature awakening. Always in a sweat, always moments before he killed the man.

Gray light shone outside the bedroom windows and the digital clock on the oak table which Kate had refinished the previous summer read six-ten. Grayson managed a slight smile for his wife, then rolled his eyeballs upward in their sockets, as though to express again his apology for the disruption of her sleep. The unpredictable accepted as routine was what he realized he had come to expect of her, and again Grayson wondered at her forbearance.

"Same dream?" Kate asked.

Grayson stretched out his legs and laid his head back on the foam rubber pillow, staring at the ceiling.

"Just about," he answered.

"Think you can get back to sleep?"

"I'll give it a try," Grayson said as he untangled the bedsheet and spread it across both him and Kate as she lay down beside him and caressed his chest with her hand.

"I love you," she whispered.

"I know you do, Kate. I know you do," Grayson whispered in return, the genuineness of the emotion triggering a sudden inhalation.

He lay on his back, the royal sleeping position he recalled from some distant memory. Particulars of the dream nagged his consciousness, staving off sleep as the gray light brightened with dawn. Beside him Kate's breathing steadied into the rhythm so familiar it had become a soothing lullaby for him. But its calming effects failed as his eyes refused to remain shut, the lids fluttering open, keeping pace with his concerns. Faint rumblings of early morning traffic from the Interstate wafted on a breeze which ballooned the curtains inward from the windows. Birds chattered in the trees and shrubs, and Grayson heard the shower running in the next door neighbor's bathroom. He had always believed the houses in this old neighborhood had been placed too close to one another. Every month when he wrote out the check for the mortgage payment, he reasoned that for such a sum, no man should be subjected to a view of his neighbors. How much must he pay for insulation? Insulation from the press of other's problems. Insulation from the plague of this dream.

Grayson rolled to his side, a sleeping position for which he could recall no name, if one even existed, and eyed a crack in the wall plaster, tiny and irregular, tracing its fractured path to the window sill. Restlessness, whether induced by the dream or his habitual dissatisfaction with the house, animated his limbs as though some unseen puppeteer had yanked crucial strings. He swing his legs off the bed,

rose to sitting position and turned to view his wife. Kate slept undisturbed as Grayson rose and tiptoed from the room. He strode down the corridor to the spare bedroom at the rear of the house, where he sat on a walnut chair before a desk, another piece Kate had stripped and refinished that summer. He held in his hands the contracts which had been delivered by special messenger the week before. Kate had not yet signed them.

A San Francisco firm, financed with Japanese capital, sought to franchise Kate's shop. A generous cash settlement for the rights to the shop name and concept, in addition to Kate's appointment as a vice-president, would erase Grayson's money worries for the rest of their lives.

Yet Kate permitted the contracts to age on the desk. Just a slight scratch of the pen, Grayson thought, and every headache associated with the shop and its operation vanishes . . . someone in San Francisco earns the ulcers.

AT THE END OF THE BLOCK a garbage truck turned into the alley behind the row of houses, its diesel engine complaining as it wheezed to a halt and discharged its driver. Grayson gazed out the window with a vacant stare, his mind visualizing the pleasant, neighborless view from their new home, a vista of towering evergreens and lush meadows sloping toward the sea, or perhaps a mountain lake clear and brilliantly blue. His dreamworld in which he might be free of dreams. The placidity of Grayson's fantasy shattered beneath the sudden awareness that he had not put out by the garbage cans the box of rags and empty paint cans the night before. The truck ground its way down the alley toward the house, and Grayson raced to the bathroom, where he speedily donned a pair of jeans, slipped his feet into thonged sandals, and sped down two flights of stairs to the basement.

The box was cumbersome because of its bulk and not from any great weight: a carton in which books had been shipped to the shop, now piled high with empty paint cans and rags starched with dried paint. Grayson's nostrils prickled at the smell of the kitchen, the walls a pale green, the odor of paint not as heady as last night but still forceful. He balanced the box on his hip and swung open the back door, unlocked the screened door, then angled through the doorway, pushing against the screen with a corner of the box. The door ripped, the frame closed against Grayson, and a section of the screen folded around the box like wrapping paper. He cursed under his breath and pushed against the door frame, sidling outside with the box edge cutting into his thigh. If it's not one thing with this house, it's another, he

thought. Scuffing through the dewy grass, he carried the carton across the yard to the gate in the rear fence. The garbage truck, its exhaust charcoal against the silver sky, idled three houses down the alley. A man in grimy denim overalls and a ruffled shirt with the sleeves cut off disappeared behind the truck, carrying a large, gray plastic tub bulging with Grayson's neighbors' refuse. Leaning over the waist-high plank fence, Grayson lowered the box to the patch of gravel beside his trash cans. He stared at the cans and the rags, recalling the argument with Kate over the wisdom of painting the kitchen.

Her stubbornness in the matter still rankled, and when at last from fatigue he surrendered to her insistence, a new conflict arose over Kate's selection of colors. Grayson could not in all his memories remember a pale green kitchen; yellow, pink, or white—these were the colors of kitchens. Once, in a cousin's home in New Hampshire, he had seen a two-tone blue kitchen, robin's egg on the walls with navy trim on the cabinets and woodwork. And all her dishes, Pfaltzgraff Yorktowne stoneware . . . blue and white everywhere. But never green. Pale green. With each brush stroke Grayson had balked, wondering why Kate's fix-it-up fever burned so intensely, when her signature on the contracts resting on the desk upstairs could hire as many professional painters as she could possibly want, each and every one of them matching colors and hues to swatches of material from the new furniture, the new walls in their new home.

The diesel engine coughed and Grayson looked up to see the man halt the garbage truck by the edge of his property. The man climbed down from the high cab and stared at Grayson, then hefted his tub on his shoulder and walked toward a row of trash cans. Witnessing the man at so close a distance pricked within Grayson's memory a withered notion, that insight could be gleaned from conversation with a working man. Somehow, the adage promised, people who labored with their hands divined answers to profound questions of purpose: Why love? Why live? Simple solutions evolved from a simple existence. Grayson recognized the fallacy of such an idealistic supposition, admitting his life at present seemed complex simply because his own aspirations remained outside his grasp; he had relinquished the determination of the future to Kate and her franchise contracts.

"You got something you wanna say to me, mister?"

The words shocked Grayson out of his thoughts, and he raised his head. What Grayson had assumed was the man's hair now revealed itself as a black kerchief bound around his head and knotted at the back of the neck. Pocketing his hands and stepping back from the fence, Grayson shook his head.

"No, No. Just getting some air, that's all."

The man eyed Grayson, then lifted the box of paint cans and rags

and tossed it into his plastic tub.

"Lots better air somewhere else than garbage cans."

Grayson nodded and turned back toward the house, the sun tinting the eastern sky with an orange haze. Scarcely nine hours earlier, he had been at the driving range, caged behind the wheel of an aging Ford tractor, dragging a contraption like an old rotary mower in ever-tightening circles, the blades slapping the yellow golf balls into twin bins. Duffers under the lights on the astroturf tees cheered whenever a drive rattled Grayson's wire cage.

In the bedroom he stripped off his jeans and slipped off his sandals, his feet wet from the dew. Kate slept on her side, one arm crooked as a pillow beneath her head, her hair fallen over half her face. Grayson gripped her shoulder and shook her. Kate muttered and twisted away to evade his grasp, but Grayson shook her more firmly.

"What is it?" Kate whined as she rolled and propped herself on her elbows, squinting at Grayson seated beside her on the mattress.

"Are you awake enough to understand me, Kate?" Grayson said. "It's important that you understand what I have to say to you."

Kate nodded her head.

"No, you have to answer me. I want to know that you'll remember what I'm going to say."

"I'm awake." Kate bristled, and sharply sat up.

"All right, now listen to me," Grayson inhaled deeply. "Those contracts have been sitting on that desk for over a week now. I think that's long enough. You make a decision today. You sign them this morning, or you send them back, okay?"

Kate said nothing, merely tilted back her head until it softly thumped against the headboard.

"I'm serious, Kate. You sign them today or you send them back."

Fingering the hem of her nightgown, Kate turned to her husband. "If that's what you want, Grayson."

"You know what I want."

"All right."

Grayson leaned over and kissed his wife, then lay down beside her and covered himself with the bedsheet. As the garbage truck in the alley droned in compressing its cargo, he pressed his eyes shut and waited to fall asleep, tension in the form of a tightening of the muscles at the back of his neck reminding him of the frustration of his incomplete dream. Perhaps this one time, he thought, just this one time, I'll kill him.

Petersen Adjusting

WILLIAM MAGRUDER

THE GENTLE APRIL BREEZE wafted the curtains at the open window. Outside, a mocking bird serenaded the morning. The sun's rays slanted gold through the curtains and across the foot of the bed. And Petersen awoke depressed.

Hands clasped behind his head, heavily muscled arms spread-eagled on the pillow, he stared steadily at the ceiling. I feel Peterson thought, so—unnecessary.

For twenty years Petersen had been told when to get up, what to wear, when and virtually what to eat, where to go, what to do when he got there, and how it was to be done. And now? Now nobody cared—nor would anyone know—what he did or did not do, or when or where or how.

That's what the trouble is, Petersen decided, I got nothing that needs doing, and I ain't used to that. Not for twenty years I ain't used to that.

TIMOTHY PETERSEN, an only child, was born and spent his first twelve years on a farm. Then his father went to work for the railroad's maintenance shops in the small town of Timmons ville. Eventually the farm was sold and they bought a house there.

Through childhood and adolescence Timothy (called "Timmie" by his mother, but never by anyone else) grew to be a quiet, in-turned person, like his parents, with his own private way of working things out. So they were not shocked, and showed no surprise if they felt it, when, one morning when he was seventeen, he got some papers together, took a bus the fifty-five miles into Atlanta, and brought home with him a release for his father to sign so that he could enlist in the Marine Corps.

Once he adapted to the ways of the Marines, his twenty years passed in an untroubled and uneventful fashion, which was the way he liked for things to go. He was in Korea for a while. After that, he was at Camp Butler in Okinawa, then at Camp Pendleton, and finally at Cherry Point, North Carolina.

He advanced only as far as Lance Corporal. He had no desire for authority; in fact he worked at avoiding it. He was where he wanted to

be, doing the things he liked doing. He was in maintenance, getting grease on his hands, assembling and repairing, making machines perform.

Nobody bothered Petersen. He made a friendly appearance. He was blonde and fair of complexion, and his round face always wore a smile, or seemed to be on the verge of breaking into one. And if people considered him a dumb Swede they didn't say so in his presence. He was, after all, six feet two, and carried two hundred and twenty odd pounds of muscle.

The end of Petersen's twentieth year approached. He could retire then if he wanted, or he could sign over for another hitch. He hadn't given it a lot of thought. When the time came he would sign over. But then things began happening.

The base got a new Commanding General with a lot of new ideas, and some of them directly affected Petersen. The bench press and metal lathe, two of his principal prides and pleasures, were replaced by new ones that were computerized. Put a card in a slot and they made their own settings and adjustments automatically. Clean hands, a card punch, and paper work replaced tools, grease, and wiping rags.

And in the midst of these disturbances he got the letter from Cletus Smith, a Timmons ville real estate man. He wanted to sell the Petersen home. Petersen's mother had died five years before, his father two years after that, and the place had since been standing vacant.

Cletus also wanted Petersen to authorize his painting the place and fixing it up before offering it for sale. To show the need, he enclosed a photograph he had taken.

It was the first picture Petersen had ever had of his home. And it was a shock to him. The last time he had seen it was when he went back for his father's funeral. It had been neat and clean and trim then, as his father had always kept it. But in the picture there were splotches of paint peeling on its side, shards of glass from a broken window at the front, a board gone from the porch flooring, and a once trim lawn overgrown with jimson weeds and dandelions. Looking at it made Petersen feel sad and ashamed. I shouldn't have let that happen, he thought.

The letter went into a desk drawer, unanswered. But he carried the picture around in his shirt pocket, and now and then he would take it out to study it. He began to recall the names of names of neighbors and friends and things that had happened when he lived there.

This was what he was doing when the file dropped on his desk. It was mid-morning. He had fed the machines their metal and punch cards. The sounds told him they were doing their jobs. They would ring bells to let him know when they were finished, and until then there was nothing for him to do.

The Sergeant Major was at the front of his desk. He stood up, and assumed a position somewhere between at ease and attention.

"Your re-up papers, Petersen. You didn't come in so I brought them over for you to sign."

Petersen looked down at the folder. Beside it was the picture. His eyes moved out, to the machines at work, back to the picture, and finally to the sergeant's face.

"No, Tops," he said.

The sergeant explained to Petersen all the benefits he would get, and all the reasons he should reenlist.

"No, Sergeant Major," Petersen said when he had finished.

And so, at age thirty-seven, Petersen came back to Timmonsville, to the small, white bungalow, and to the surroundings he had seen only in brief visits for twenty years.

The town had remained rural, uncrowded and unhurried, friendly and neighborly. Petersen liked that. The house seemed smaller than he had remembered it. He felt a little confined in his bedroom, having been accustomed to larger sleeping quarters, but he discarded as unseemly the thought of moving into what had been his parents' bedroom.

He began settling in.

ON THIS MONDAY MORNING, the beginning of his fourth month as a civilian, Petersen threw back the sheet and swung his feet to the floor. He looked through the window and across the freshly mown lawn at the new mesh fence bordering the yard, shining brightly in the morning sun.

He had finished it on Saturday. His hand on the window sill clenched into a fist, feeling the grip and chunk of post hole diggers and the pull of the wire fencing being wrestled into place. He had finished everything on Saturday. Broken windows and bad flooring replaced, new door and window hardware where it was needed, house painted inside and out, lawn weeded, mowed and trimmed, and finally the fencing.

So now what? Petersen wondered.

In the first months in the Marines he thought he had made a bad, bad mistake. The physical part of basic training didn't bother him, but it didn't interest him either. He found the whole thing tiresome. Corporals and even P.F.C.s telling you what to do every minute. Living in barracks with recruits who all talked and acted like a bunch of kids.

He took a deep breath, exhaled, and got up to go to the bathroom.

But he liked to finish things he started. He'd kept his eyes and ears open, asked a few questions, and when he finished basic requested and was assigned to maintenance. And from then on, he had things going his way.

Rinsing off his face after shaving, he stopped to look thoughtfully at his reflection, serious but not frowning. His round, full face wouldn't accomodate a frown.

I got some fitting in to do, he thought. There's a place for me here. I just have to find it.

FIRST, PETERSEN GOT MARRIED. This required some thinking and planning. In the service he had had the usual dallies with a variety of women, but all of them brief and casual. No need or reason for marriage had ever occurred to him. Until now.

His selection would depend on his common sense, and on who was available. He was thirty-seven, so she shouldn't be too young. She should be local, so she would be satisfied living in a small town like Timmons ville. Which didn't leave him with a lot of choices.

Agnes Wilcox wasn't ugly, but she wasn't pretty either. Plain was the word. She wore no jewelry or ornaments and dressed simply, and her overall appearance was neat and clean. Her hair, a corn-straw brown, didn't look too bad when it was fresh from the overnight curlers. Her face was thin, like her voice, which took on a whining quality when she got upset. Her body—well, you could tell she was a woman, but that was about all you could say for it.

Agnes had just put her twenty-ninth birthday behind her without having been married, proposed to, or seriously propositioned. When her thoughts wandered to her age or marital status—an area she tried to keep them away from—she wavered between frustration and despair. Orphaned in her early teens, she had been raised by an aunt. For ten years she had worked at The Diner as waitress, cashier, fry cook, and whatever else needed doing.

At mid-morning Petersen found her cleaning the coffee urn. He sat down at the counter, waited until she finished, and began his suit.

The entire operation, from the counter to Justice of the Peace Holley Crinshaw, took fifteen days. It would have been completed in the second week if it hadn't been for the blood tests and waiting period.

Petersen felt strange at first, bedding down with his new wife in his parents' bedroom. But Agnes took it for granted the room would be theirs, and he made no objection. In fact, he made no objection about anything. She "had to have" new things for herself and the house. Petersen got them for her. He bought and installed a dishwasher before she thought to ask for it. He took out the garbage, mowed the lawn, tended the flowers and their small vegetable garden, and kept things repaired and in working order.

Although rescued from spinsterhood and catered to in such a fashion, Agnes was not happy. Happiness and Agnes had been strangers all of her life. She viewed it with suspicion.

In less than six months she began complaining about their finan-

cial condition. Petersen, having no head or heart for paper work, had opened a joint bank account, and left to her the paying of their bills. Their only income was his pension, and their bank balance kept getting lower, as she frequently called to his attention.

Then she decided that Petersen must get a job, and included this in her running comments about the state of their union. Petersen went his way, his face blandly untroubled, neither agreeing nor disagreeing. And when he told her he was going to work she credited herself with this accomplishment.

She was wrong, though he never told her so. He had planned on doing this all along. It was just that it had taken some time to find employment that suited his requirements.

He was determined that he would get something that didn't involve commuting to work, and job opportunities were scarce in Timmons ville. The railroad maintenance shops had been closed down. There were no other industries there. Then he learned that old Abercrombie, owner of Abercrombie's Hardware, needed a man. He went to see him.

Abercrombie used only a working force of one in his store, but he used him thoroughly. Nobody worked for him long. Even Johnny Calish, who was simple-minded—who listened to everybody and always smiled, but had trouble understanding—had quit.

Which was why there was a vacancy for Petersen. He took the job, and he worked well and hard and long. Never before had the store been so clean, or its stock arranged and displayed in such neat order.

More customers began coming in, and Abercrombie's business increased steadily. Petersen always took time to explain things to the amateur fixers and mechanically ignorant. For complicated problems he would go to their homes after working hours and do it himself.

"No thanks," he would say when they offered to pay him, "it's my pleasure. I enjoy fixing things."

Abercrombie began to have trouble finding complaints he could direct at Petersen: his disposition worsened. But if his mouthings bothered Petersen it wasn't evident. His work now an established routine which required little thought. He was working out what still needed doing, and how to do it.

TIMMEEE."

Agnes's voice came up the hallway from the kitchen. She felt it necessary to call him every morning just as he was getting up.

Petersen had been awake for some time, but hadn't moved. He was again lying with his hands clasped behind his head, arms spread-eagled on his pillow, blue eyes looking at the ceiling. He had decided what had to be done.

He didn't like to be called Timmie. I'll have to let her know one day, he thought, but nicely. After all, she doesn't know.

But that's for another time, he decided.

"Timothy, get up now." Exactly on schedule. She would have her head through the kitchen doorway. The whiny tone in her raised voice bothered him a little.

What is it with her, he wondered. He judged his life by the way it had been in the service—which was all he had to judge it by—and Agnes was acting more and more like a green buck sergeant. Telling him what to do next, following him around, looking over his shoulder. Any day, he thought, she would be showing up at Abercrombie's, checking on what he was doing and how he was doing it there.

"Timothy!" Now her voice had the tinny screech of an amateur bugler sounding reveille. Her steps tapped up the hallway, as on every other morning. Her face, surrounded by red plastic hair curlers, her lips pulled down to a frown, appeared in the bedroom door.

Petersen had come close to a court-martial only one time in his twenty years' service. An officer just put in charge of the Maintenance Shops at Camp Pendleton came over to watch him work, and told him he was doing it wrong. Petersen put down his tools, raised himself up, and stood wiping his arms with a grease rag until the officer finished. Then he said, "Captain, you don't know what you're talking about. Sir."

Luckily for everybody, the captain had sense enough to check before saying anything else, and found out that Petersen was right.

"Your breakfast—" Agnes began.

"Agnes," Petersen said quietly from his pillow, "I don't need all this close supervision. Now," and his last words came with all the force and volume of a drill sergeant on Monday morning, "just GET OFF MY BACK."

Agnes had never heard such a frightening sound in her entire life. Her mouth stayed open. Her eyes widened. Then her head flicked out of sight and she retreated wordlessly to the kitchen.

He took considerably longer than was his custom in shaving and showering and dressing. When he went in to the kitchen for his breakfast it was served and eaten in complete silence. Agnes's eyes, darting now and then to his face, were met with a calm, expressionless gaze, and he made no comment.

Finished, he wiped his mouth with his napkin, lay it by his plate, and got up from the table. Agnes was at the sink, her back to him, looking out the window. When he passed her he leaned over to kiss her on the cheek. Her head jerked away and she raised a protective hand, as though he had threatened violence.

Petersen left through the back door, shutting it quietly behind him.

He was supposed to be at work at eight o'clock, but Petersen was

invariably there at two or three minutes before the hour. This day he walked in the front entrance, at his usual casual pace, at five minutes before nine.

Abercrombie was standing behind the counter, next to the cash register.

"Well," he said in his high fluty voice, "I see you finally made it." His lips were in a tight, straight line. His eyes, behind his rimless bifocals, were drawn to a squint. "Where do you think you are? Back in the Marines? In some cushy, no-work job?"

Petersen kept walking until he was just opposite Abercrombie at the counter.

"Abercrombie?"

The usual "Mister" was noticeably absent. And his voice had a cadence and volume never before heard by Abercrombie.

"STOW IT!," Petersen finished.

Leaving Abercrombie motionless, breathing through his open mouth, he walked to the back of the store, hung up his zipper jacket, and began opening a box of bolts with a claw hammer.

The day went altogether quietly. Petersen did his work in his accustomed, competent fashion. He went to The Diner for his lunch at his regular time. At 6:00 o'clock he took his jacket from the hanger and slung it over his shoulder, nodded a brief, single nod to Abercrombie as he passed him, and left.

Abercrombie, standing behind the counter, watched Petersen's back until it disappeared from view. He was wondering what had happened, and why, and what would happen next.

Agnes, leaning on her arms over the kitchen sink and staring unseeing out of the window—where she had spent a considerable part of the day—was wondering the same things. She raised herself and turned suddenly, thinking that she had forgotten part of his dinner, but before she got to the stove remembered that she hadn't.

Walking the four blocks home, Petersen found himself humming a song in an undertone. He tried to think of the name of it, but couldn't.

He returned a wave to Cletus Smith, passing in his old, blue pick-up truck with a load of something in the back.

"Mrs. Mueller." He acknowledged a smile and wave from their neighbor across the street.

"It's working fine now," she called over to him.

The sun was still up a couple of hours. He would have time to fix the leak in the garden faucet after supper. Tomorrow he would sectionalize those bolt boxes at the store, to take care of the new sizes they were getting in.

Agnes and Abercrombie would be back to normal in a few days, which was fine with him. He felt good about things in general. Useful. Necessary. And free.

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Contributors

A teacher of American Studies at the University of Toledo, WILLIAM K. BOTTORFF has published a number of scholarly books and articles, but in recent years has turned to painting, poetry, and fiction. Our faithful contributor LOUIS DANIEL BRODSKY has had a new volume of poems, *Mississippi Vistas*, published by the University Press of Mississippi. Alaskan KAY DEETER has already placed thirty poems from a collection to be called *Body to the Soup*. This is her second contribution to our pages. KATE JENNINGS writes from her home in Geneva, Switzerland of her admiration for one of our favorite poets, J.B. Goodenough. WILLIAM MAGRUDER lives and writes in Florida: we have special reasons for welcoming him to our midst with his first publication. JOHN M. McNAMARA's stories have appeared in *The Minotaur*, *Crosscurrents*, and *The Piedmont Literary Review* among others. He lives in Omaha, and is currently working on a couple of novels. GLORIA RUTH has an M.A. in Renaissance and Medieval Literature, a Ph.D. in Communication Theory, two small children, a house in the forest, and an abiding fascination with sports car racing.

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